

## NATO – RUSSIA CRISIS OF 2022. TAKING LESSONS FROM THE PREVIOUS CRISIS

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**Abstract:** *In this article we are placing an analysis of the current crisis that erupted at the Russian-Ukrainian border. The main purpose is to identify possible hidden causes that could influence evolution. For this purpose, we have developed a comparative analysis of the current situation, taking attention to the similarities with the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Next, using the hypothetical-deductive analysis, we will highlight what could be the major objectives of the big actors involved and what could be the big dilemmas they are facing in decision making. At the end of the paper, we will submit the conclusions by following the analyzes that we have proposed. The motivation for choosing this topic is to understand the future of the crisis and to focus on the crisis in the interests of the EU and NATO in general, and especially in Romania. The novelty of the research lies in comparing the evolution of the actual state of the situation on the Russian-Ukrainian border, with the one of 1962, when the tensions between NATO and the former Warsaw Treaty Organization reached their peak, as well as from the analysis based on the fundamental differences between the democratic regimes and the totalitarian ones, focused on identifying the objectives of great importance that each of the parties wants to achieve.*

**Keywords:** *crisis; conflict; Russia; Ukraina; NATO.*

### Introduction

The main topic that we intend to analyze in this paper with a scientific approach is the current crisis at the Russian-Ukrainian border, the main purpose is to identify possible hidden causes that could influence evolution. To achieve this purpose, we resorted to a comparative analysis of the current situation with that of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, with increased attention benefiting from the similarities between the two critical battle cries. Next, starting from the fundamental differences between democratic and autocratic regimes, using the hypothetical-deductive analysis, we will highlight what could be the major objectives of the big actors involved and what could be the big dilemmas they face in decision making. At the end of the paper, we will submit to attention the conclusions by following the analysis we proposed at the beginning.

The motivation for choosing this topic for analysis is given by the proximity of the crisis situation and the impact it can have on the interests of the EU and NATO in general and on those of Romania in particular.

The novelty of the research lies in the comparative analysis of the current situation on the Russian-Ukrainian border with that of the crisis in the vicinity of Cuba in 1962 when the tensions between NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organization reached their peak and the armed conflict between the two large blocs seemed imminent, as well as from the analysis based on the fundamental differences of the democratic regimes and the totalitarian ones, focused on identifying the objectives of great importance that each of the parties wants to achieve.

Since the beginning of civilization, for the sake of establishing peace and global harmony, we are seeking ways to defuse the crisis, resolve tensions, and end conflicts and wars. Although it isn't always possible to avoid conflicts because of geopolitical interest, financial issues, differences in ethnicities, the aggressiveness of ambitious leaders, and so that makes it hard for people of various regions or states to live friendly in a peaceful manner. To go for further understanding, according to the aforesaid point of view, the historical reconciliation between France and Germany is remarkable, the very foundation on which the European Union was built, so that the old continent enjoys, with small exceptions, more than half of a century of peace and prosperity, has led to unprecedented technological and social progress.

Unfortunately, if the people of the EU Member States have come to accept and understand that "*unity in diversity*" is the guarantor of peaceful coexistence, the same is not true in other parts of the world. Thus, less than a thousand kilometers from the EU's eastern border, we are currently facing a state of crisis that has led to the largest concentration of troops in history since World War II and which, if it is not treated with all the seriousness and available means for peace involved, it can trigger a major conflict in those areas; implications and impact on humanity are difficult to anticipate, especially since the invention of weapons of mass destruction.

Thus, for the beginning we will make a comparative-transversal analysis of two different stages of manifestation of the global interests of some actors in different geographical areas, at different times, the common point being the geopolitical context in which the scenario was implemented. Later, starting from the differences between the forms of government of the actors involved in this crisis, democracy, and autocracy, we will perform an analysis based on criteria represented by elements of operative art (end state, vulnerabilities, strengths, weaknesses, effects, etc.).

## **1. Crisis at the russian-ukrainian border and cuba rocket crisis**

In this chapter, our intention is to do a comparative analysis between the biggest crisis during the Cold War and the current crisis at the Russian-Ukrainian border, because, at least until a certain moment, we can identify approximately the same scenario of evolution.

In order to better understand the origins and causes of the current crisis that has arisen at the Russian-Ukrainian border and which tends to turn into a real armed conflict, either between the two neighboring countries or between democracy and autocracy, on the territory of a country that by no means wants this, we must go back to the end of the Second World War. In our opinion, the post-bellum situation is deeply marked by the atypical peace concluded in 1947, in the sense that it was not a wave of peace between the victors and the vanquished but a peace or, rather, an armistice concluded between the two great victorious allies: the democratic system represented by the United States of America (USA) and Great Britain and the dictatorial system represented by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). We consider that this conflagration ended in such an armistice because the conflict between the two former allies lasted for another half-century and became known in history as the Cold War, in fact, one of the longest phase of competition in human history.

As we said, the end of the greatest conflagration in human history has led to a situation of atypical conflict between the two most important actors in the world, namely the USA and the USSR. In a short time, both countries realized that "where there is one, there is no power" and thus emerged the two great alliances that dominated the end of the last millennium: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO/OTAN) – the alliance of states with democratic values – and the Warsaw Treaty Organization – an alliance of dictatorial states. The major differences between the two alliances lie in the very differences between the

democratic and the dictatorial system. Thus, whether NATO retains the sovereignty of Member States that decide for themselves whether or not to support initiatives proposed by other states or its representatives, and whether or not to participate in any possible conflict in which it is involved, the Warsaw Treaty Organization is characterized by the full submission of the Member States to the strong will of the Kremlin and they are obliged to support the imposed decisions, even the military intervention in the territory of an alliance member state. Small exceptions, such as the condemnation of the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, cannot be considered expressions of the freedom of decision of the states situated east of the Red Curtain.

The tense situation between the two major blocs had its ups and downs, culminating in the outbreak of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis (History Today, 2007). Although the strained relations between these actors have also had consequences that may seem more serious, such as the Korean War or the Vietnam War, in our opinion, the high number of nuclear weapons involved in the Cuban Missile Crisis, generated the peak of the tensions between NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

The main cause of these crises is, most probably, the desire of each party to expand or, in the worst case, to maintain the sphere of influence established in 1947 and 1954 by the Paris Peace Treaties (American Foreign Relations Web Site). Although the current situation is very different from that of 1962, the Warsaw Treaty Organization was disbanded and the USSR was dissolved in 1991 (Historia Web Site), NATO and the Russian Federation now having a common border, we can conclude that the current crisis at the Russian-Ukrainian border is essentially still an attempt to expand the sphere of influence of predominantly Western democracies on the one hand and autocracies, as the dictatorships are now called, on the other hand, mostly Eastern. Thus, we can say that this crisis is a confrontation between West and East or between Occident and Orient, terms frequently used during the Cold War, or between NATO and Russia – the heir of USSR, the leader of the powerful Eastern Bloc.

The similarities between the two situations continue, each of the parties claims that they want to avoid conflict, make public their demands, threaten with the use of military force, or for imposing economic and financial sanctions, or the start of sending troops in the area. As in 1962, the more aggressive and belligerent tone belongs to the regime based on dictatorial principles, which, in the shadow of populist discourse focused, depending on the situation, either on non-involvement in the internal affairs of states (the 1962 crisis), or on the right to self-determination of peoples of a certain ethnicity (independence recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk in 2022), seeks to impose its own will and leadership in another country, if necessary, by the use of the armed forces. On the other hand, democratic states adopt a more conciliatory tone, urging negotiations, but, if necessary, do not hesitate from taking the necessary measures to achieve their own goals and to prevent their opponent from fulfilling his own. Moreover it can be noticed that after 2010, the geo-strategical endeavour was characterised by the revitalisation of the race for resources, highlighted through the Ukrainian conflict, as well as through other hybride manifestations (STANCIU, 2016, pp. 88-107).

The difference in tone can be explained again by the basic differences between democratic and dictatorial regimes. In a democracy, decisions and actions are based mainly on consensus and popular support, while in a dictatorship, decisions are made by a small circle of people, often by one person and imposed on many, with an opponent or critic removed in the shortest time possible. Another justification for the different approach to public discourse lies in the defensive nature of NATO, as stipulated in the founding act (NATO/OTAN Official Web Site), which must be respected in democracy, and the tendency of dictatorships to disregard any legislative or other regulation, the will of the supreme leader being the only law valid at any given time.

Furthermore, we can see that in both cases, as the situation evolves, the demands become more and more and sometimes utopian, but all the public statements of the representatives of the parties involved have as a central element, the availability for negotiation. This cannot be attributed to the lack of experience and expertise, but to everyone's attempt to gain the most advantageous position at the negotiating table. Sending troops in the crisis zone opens a ground to use arms' threats during negotiations and can lead to intimidation of the other party, and many demands at the highest level provide a greater margin for negotiation.

So far, in our opinion, the similarity between the situation and the evolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 and that of the current Russian-Ukrainian border crisis is striking, the only element that remains unknown is the end of the latter. Although we cannot say with certainty that the end of the current crisis will be the same as that of the 1962 crisis, relevant to us is a possible long-term consequence of the outcome of the first state of crisis.

Our view is that a close link can be made between the decision of leader Nikita Khrushchev to cede, to withdraw his ships from the western Atlantic and not to go all the way to meet the original objectives and his replacement from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) leader position and, implicitly, of the USSR. It is not excluded that this resignation was perceived as a sign of weakness by the members of the governing bodies of the CPSU, and two years later, in 1964, we witness the first and only replacement of a communist leader in Moscow by a palace coup (Britannica Web Site).

This fact cannot be ignored and, moreover, it cannot but influence the future decisions of Russian President, who, regardless of the outcome of the current crisis, is obliged to maintain his victorious aura and thus avoid losing power. This is possible if, regardless of how the crisis ended, the general perception will be that the desired end state established at the beginning of the crisis has been met.

In conclusion, the fate of the USSR leader from 1953 to 1964 may be one of the main factors for which Russian President decided to escalate the crisis between the Russian Federation and Ukraine in a real military conflict, the intrinsic motive of this decision residing in his desire to remain in the current position of power. Another important factor is the goals that each of the actors involved set at the beginning.

The emergence of the two major alliances The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact Organization represented the delimitation of states with democratic values from dictatorial ones. The two blocs being the supporters of the positions of force in the conflicts of the last century, they maintain their regional authority, in the conditions of contesting the unipolarity of the global power.

However, a major difference between the two crises is that at the beginning of the present one, Russian Federation claimed that it was not involved in any way in this crisis, the responsables for its outbreak being ordinary citizens, whose level of patriotism is extremely high. Therefore, Moscow's continued denial made it difficult to estimate the extent of Russian forces involvement in what had turned into a real armed conflict. This may be considered an excellent example of Maskirovka. Last but not least, the news about one humanitarian convoy was meant to be a cover of troops infiltration on ukrainian territory through the border crossings entirely controlled by the Russian authorities (Alexandru Roxana, 2021, p. 150).

Consequently, the will of the two blocs is antagonistic, so the final state of the conflict is not the same. Thus, in the next chapter we will make a comparative analysis of what we consider to be the end state established by each of the parties involved in the current crisis on the Russian-Ukrainian border; the continuation or cessation of the military conflict and the defuse of the crisis situation largely depend on the degree of their fulfillment.

## 2. Russia and NATO – End States

Once again, we must return to the differences between the forms of government that define the two parties involved in this crisis: democracy and autocracy. Thus, if in the case of NATO, we can say that a clear distinction can be made between what certain members of the alliance want, be they member states or influential leaders, and the general interest of the alliance, on the other side, it is not very clear whether the personal interest of the autocrat leader pales in the general interest of the state or vice versa.

In view of this, NATO's intended end state of affairs is, in general, to maintain order and peace on the eastern border, to end the conflict, and to maintain Ukraine's status quo, including its right to self-determination. At the same time, one of NATO's major vulnerabilities is a strong point and stems from the need for consensus for decision-making. On the one hand, this need can lead to difficult adaptability during the course of events, and on the other hand, it can be a factor in strengthening the position of the alliance's representatives at the negotiating table.

Things get very complicated when we analyze the end state desired by the Russian Federation. This complication lies in the difference between what Russia "wants" and what Russian President wants. Like any nation, state or country, the Russian Federation tends to return to its maximum expansion for a very simple reason: the status of great power that derives from it. Similarly, like any other past, present, or future autocratic leader or dictator, Russian President wants to remain in the position of control and strength that he is in today. We do not consider that this desire is based only on selfish motives, but can also be explained by the conservation instinct of the human being; it is very rare that the change of the leaders of the totalitarian regimes has been done with their survival and freedom.

What's more, we should understand that an authoritarian leader remains in power as long as those close to him, members of small decision-making circles, grant him that authority/power. In our view, it is only now that we can make a pertinent analysis of what the end state of Russian President may be regarding the current crisis at the Russian-Ukrainian border.

This requires a brief foray into recent history and brief analysis of the culmination of 2014, the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. We do not intend to continue a detailed analysis of this event of major geopolitical importance (analysis of this event: Lucian Valeriu, Scipanov, cpt.cdor.instr.sup.ing.drd, Florin, Nistor, cdor.instr.av.dr., *Considerații privind acțiunile militare desfășurate în nordul Mării Negre*, Bulletin of the National Defense University "Carol I", Bucharest, June 2015, p. 100, (<https://revista.unap.ro/index.php/revista/article/download/153/132/>)), but we will focus on what can be considered to be the factor with the strongest impact on the current crisis: the imposition of economic and financial sanctions, diplomatic and not only, both to Russia and to certain citizens of this country. As we can see, the sanctions imposed on Russia have a major impact on the standard of living of ordinary citizens, and their dissatisfaction is reflected in the level of popularity enjoyed by the current Kremlin leader. On the other hand, the sanctions imposed on certain citizens of the Russian Federation do not have a very big impact on ordinary people, but they do affect them and their circle of relatives. What is important, however, is that these people, targeted by the sanctions imposed, are, for the most part, members of the small decision-making circles in Moscow.

Faced with a sharp decline in popularity among many, Russian President is forced to rely on the support of the few and influential to remain in the position of authority held. Thus, we can state with a high degree of certainty that its "*selfish*" purpose is to obtain the lifting of the sanctions imposed following the annexation of Crimea, both those aimed at the state and those aimed at certain citizens. As the lifting of sanctions amounts to the recognition of the

Russian Federation's right to Crimea by the European Union (EU) and NATO, we can say that the end state desired by the Russian leader is precisely the recognition by these entities of Crimean affiliation with the Russian Federation. This claim is not so surprising or of the realm of the fantastic, if we take into account the result of the organized referendum, after which more than 90% of voters chose to join the Russian Federation (Digi-24, 2014). Even if the organization and conduct of the referendum did not benefit from the monitoring of international organizations, the result is strongly contested by democratic states, until the organization of another such approach, we could see that this annexation enjoys some validation of the Crimean Peninsula inhabitants.

Over time, statements have appeared in the press about the Russian Federation's intention to reach the mouths of the Danube, fulfilling a wish made by Tsar Peter I the Great, to establish a land link between mainland Russia and the Crimean Peninsula, or to annex the eastern part of Ukraine. These statements on Moscow's claims are not without substance, but in this case, we do not consider them to be binding.

Russia can only reach the mouth of the Danube through other territorial annexations, thus risking new and tougher sanctions that will further affect the living standards of Russians, translated into authoritarian leadership by declining popularity and growing dependence on members of the small decision-making circle. Also, from our point of view, the gains of such an enlargement of Russia are not worth the possible risks, because, in the happiest case, Russia could only reach the Chilia Arm, and most of the maritime traffic is taken over by the Sulina Arm, located on the territory of Romania, a NATO member country and under the protection of Article 5 of the NATO Charter (MAE-România Web Site).

Moreover, even a smaller territorial annexation meant to make the land link between mainland Russia and the Crimean Peninsula, justified by the need to supply the latter, cannot be considered very important for the Kremlin leader. At present, Russia already enjoys a landline of communications with the Crimean Peninsula via the bridge over the Kerch Strait. In addition, Russia's Black Sea ports, mainland ports, and the Russian merchant fleet provide the infrastructure and resources needed to fully transform Crimea into a province of the Russian state. If we take into account the fact that a similar situation is found in the case of the Kaliningrad region, in which Moscow does not issue any additional territorial claims, we can conclude that these claims have only the ultimate goal of creating an advantage at the negotiating table.

As far as the eastern region of Ukraine is concerned, no matter how highly industrialized it is, we believe its annexation could not be done as peacefully and smoothly as in the case of the 2014 annexation. Firstly, the percentage of ethnic Russians in this region is lower and, secondly, the new administration may face actions of sabotage the smooth running of the region, caused by the dissatisfaction of the population in the region, the resentments they have towards those who, they can be perceived as aggressors. Undisputed evidence in support of this assertion is given by the resistance met by the Russian Army in the city of Kharkov, which, despite having a predominantly Russian ethnic population, opposes and has resisted for more than 60 days in the face of numerous occupation attempts carried out by Russian soldiers. If we consider that the same resistance is encountered in other localities, considered easy targets for the planners of Russia's military action in Ukraine, we can realize the problems that the Russian administration would have to face in case of a possible annexations of these territories. In addition, if the annexation of Crimea was carried out with almost no casualties, in the case of the eastern region of Ukraine the number of victims is already very high, leading to an enmity of the local population against the aggressor from the east.

If we succeeded to make a quick review of the end states desired by the two major actors involved in this crisis, let's now try to make a brief analysis of what could be the end of it. In this case, the NATO alliance is obliged to act on the assumptions and theoretical

estimates but still benefit from the lessons learned throughout history. In our opinion, democratic countries are facing a double dilemma: the first – forcing Russian President to give in and the second – if they accept even if only his claim to recognize the annexation of Crimea, which is a guarantee that in the short term they will not face a new such claim?

Why did we say that forcing Russian President to resign is a dilemma for Western democracies? From our point of view, in connection with what happened in the 1962 missile crisis and the not-so-happy outcome for Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, Russia's renunciation of all claims could give rise to a perception in Moscow that the current leader is weak and that he can be replaced. In the context of the almost complete disappearance of Dmitri Medvedev from the Kremlin's political scene, a possible successor to Russian President has not yet crystallized, we can ask ourselves whether the West is ready to *gamble* and to risk creating the conditions necessary for the seizure of power in the Russian Federation by a leader with more radical and aggressive views than the current one.

Another dilemma can be easily analyzed in the light of what happened in the years before the outbreak of the greatest conflagration that mankind has faced. In the second half of the fourth decade of the twentieth century, Nazi leader Adolf Hitler received concessions after concessions from the leaders of democratic states, also on the subject of territorial annexations, all culminating on September 1, 1939, with the invasion of Poland, the beginning of World War II (Evans, 2008, pg. 1-2). Given these indisputable historical facts, in our opinion, the leaders of democratic countries face a dilemma at least as deep, whose implications in the medium and long terms are impossible to anticipate. No less noteworthy is the fact that a possible recognition by the US and its Western allies of the annexation of Crimea can be seen as a validation of China's claims against Taiwan.

Furthermore, the essence of the impact that the current situation could have upon our future was highlighted in an interview of Romanian Ambassador in Republic of Peru, Mrs. Camelia Ion-Radu published in *Revista Diplomatica*: „*The invasion of Ukraine marks a turning point in human history because the world order will never be the same. It depends on everyone's reactions to the tragedy in Ukraine. Will we return to the past, to an order based on force, in which no one will be safe? Or will we look to the future, to a world in which we all truly respect the norms and principles of international law?*” (Bilateral, 2022). We can conclude from that that any situation, be it crisis or conflict, might influence the future of human society in a variety of aspects, from education and economics to the form of government.

## Conclusions

The main purpose of this approach was to identify possible hidden causes that could influence the evolution of the current crisis on the Russian-Ukrainian border, by conducting a comparative analysis of this one with that of the 1962 missiles and to highlight the possible end states desired by the actors involved; the degree of their fulfillment depending on the evolution, aggravation or cessation of the military conflict and the resolution of the crisis situation, thus avoiding the occurrence of a conflict of regional, continental or global scope. At the same time, from our point of view, the availability of all parties involved in one way or another in these events for negotiations must reach maximum levels, taking into account the existence and possibility of using weapons of mass destruction.

History gives us many examples of intra- or inter-state crises and we can draw our own conclusions about the triggers, how they evolved or what were the best or most harmful decisions, and their impact on the outcome of that crisis. However, the geopolitical situation is never the same, so every such situation needs to be treated with the utmost seriousness and

consideration of as many factors and events as possible, regardless of the distance at which they occur, contemporary with it.

The identification of some conclusions based on an analysis using criteria from the military art sphere (end state, vulnerabilities, strengths, weaknesses, effects) was another aspect of the research, so we can continue to present some of them.

In terms of end-state, we conclude that:

- NATO's intended end state of affairs is to maintain order and peace on the eastern border, end the conflict, and maintain Ukraine's status quo, including its right to self-determination

- Russian Federation's end-state is defined by the difference between what Russia "wants" and what the Russian President willing

In terms of vulnerabilities, we conclude that:

- NATO's major vulnerabilities are a strong point of the adversary and stem from the need for consensus in decision-making

- the Russian Federation's vulnerability is the level of popularity enjoyed by the current Kremlin leader

Strengths and weaknesses:

- the sanctions imposed on Russia have a major impact on the standard of living of ordinary citizens

- new and tougher sanctions, will further affect the living standards of Russians

- a smaller territorial annexation meant to make the land link between mainland Russia and the Crimean Peninsula

In the end, but not the least, we underline some geopolitical effects:

- the annexation of Crimea can be seen as a validation of China's claims against Taiwan

- territorial disputes in the maritime space will provide implications for energy security

- implications in the medium and long term are impossible to anticipate for the moment

In the end, we conclude that the conflict is a matter of the utmost concern for NATO and the EU, and especially for their eastern border states. Moreover, the imminence of an armed conflict could lead to an increase in some state's influence within the EU to the detriment of others, mainly for two main reasons: first, the EU economy's dependence on Russia, and secondly, the influence of the EU members with nuclear power status which determined the other Member States to gravitate around these countries.

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